

A Plain, Humble, and Earnest

Address to PARLIAMENT,

in behalf of the Poor and lower Orders

of British SUBJECTS;

with a view to obtain

An *Universal* Liberty of PETITION,

A *Rational* Reform of PARLIAMENT,

AND

A *Necessary* Division of FARMS, FORESTS,

and COMMONS.

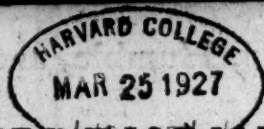
Who so stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, shall cry also himself, but shall not be heard. Prov. 21. 13.

Moreover thou shalt provide OUT OF ALL THE PEOPLE, able men, such as fear GOD, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them. Exodus 18. 21.

Wo unto them that join house to house, and field to field, until there is no place---for their neighbours. Isa. 5. 8.

MARCH, 1793.

N.B. It is recommended to persons (either in Town or Country) who, after consideration, approve the following petition, to open an *individual* Subscription to it in their own circle or connections; which may afterwards be collected, or join'd together, and presented to parliament in one body.



ADVERTISEMENT.

SINCE the following little piece went to the press, the Subscriber has received from an anonymous hand, a small Tract intitled "Reasons for contentment; addressed to the labouring part of the British Public." wrote by Mr. Paley, Archdeacon of Carlisle.

T. Bentley had before this seen two other similar publications, wrote by Drs. Vincent and Trussler, and they all bring to his remembrance what Christ said concerning the lordly, long-robed, high-seated, beneficed Ecclesiastics of his time, *They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they THEMSELVES will not touch them with one of their fingers!*

Truly, it is a very bitter, heart-rending circumstance, to see men employ those gifts of the mind which they have received from God, [the great Friend of the Poor] and that health and strength and leisure of body which they receive from the labour of the poor, in the support and defence of pride, covetousness, and oppression!—Oh! what pains do they take to persuade the wretched, that the laws of Christ and the laws of England are one! and that poverty and hard-labour, and hunger and nakedness, and ignorance and imprisonment, &c. &c. are the ordinances of God; appointed by Him as an *unalterable* portion to the major part of His Son's mystical members; and therefore a redress is neither to be expected nor endeavoured, nor scarcely even so much as to be wish'd for!

May God Almighty, the avenger of the oppressed, speedily raise up faithful, able soldiers of Jesus Christ, *with wisdom to see that the flood of national wickedness and corruption which destroys us, rises among our Teachers and Governors,—and mercy, probity, self-denial, love and courage to strike at the ROOT of our evils,—and may He also crown their labours with success!

* Jer. 48. 10. Matt. 10. 34. 2 Cor. 10. 3. 4. Eph. 6. 11—17.
1 Tim. 6. 11, 12, 2 Tim. 2. 3—5.

To the Lords and Commons of
Great Britain,
at this time assembled in Parliament.

Gentlemen,

I N the name, and by the desire of many sober, honest, industrious subjects of this kingdom, I beg leave, with due respect to your situation in the community, to lay before you some matters which belong to your province as *Legislators*, and are also highly worthy your serious consideration as *Men and Christians*.

You are not ignorant that the poor and lower orders of the people are a great means of the prosperity of the nation, and consequently they ought to *partake* thereof; but so far from feeling any benefit by the seeming increase of national riches, their condition, in general, has for many years past been growing worse and worse.

For certainly, it is impossible that it can now be so plentiful a time with the bulk of the people, as it was even within the memory of the present generation; seeing that the expences of living are nearly or altogether doubled, while multitudes have no advance in their incomes.

And it is no small addition to the grief of many who continually labour under the want of the conveniencies and comforts of life, and oftentimes its very *necessaries*, to hear the proud, selfish, unfeeling boasts of British prosperity,³

prosperity, freedom, and happiness made by some, because *their own* lot happens [in the midst of distress] to be easy and comfortable.*

I do therefore, in the behalf of many worthy members of the community, earnestly intreat you to allow the lower orders thereof freely and universally to lay their cases before you; without disguising their sentiments by flattery, and without fear or danger of prosecution, so far as their Representations are founded upon *truth*, and consistent with the fundamental, *moral* laws of christianity.

If you will be so good, for the sake of God and the poor,—of mercy and humanity, as to grant this reasonable, humble, earnest request, and cause leave for that purpose to be published in the Gazette, it will be regarded as a forerunner of those fruits which sober, honest, industrious, orderly subjects have a right to expect from a wise, good, and powerful government.

Another consideration which we beg leave to lay before you is, That the great distance at which you are placed from a state of *poverty* and *hard-labour*, disqualifies you for being such competent judges of the distresses of those situations, as many sensible men who are *not* possessed of independent fortunes; and it seems therefore a piece of justice due to the poor, to admit to seats in the House of Commons, Men whom *they* shall think best qualified to open their cases, and represent them, whatever may be their state with respect to *fortune*.

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* A small degree of inquiry and reflection wou'd convince a reasonable, merciful man that the case of multitudes among us is beggarly, slavish, and wretched.

A second humble and earnest request therefore is, that you will not only shorten the term for which you are now elected, and give the whole nation an equal and rational representation, but also by abolishing the present qualifications of fortune required in Members of parliament, open the door to every worthy man in the Nation; and appoint an adequate compensation for the services and support of them whom the people chuse for representatives; that narrowness of circumstances may not prevent the *proper* exercise of wisdom, probity, and compassion.

A third circumstance of the times, which is humbly offered to your consideration as a matter of the greatest national importance, is the pernicious, increasing practice of monopolizing *Farms*; whereby multitudes are kept out of that most rational, healthful and necessary employment *agriculture*, and forced for bread into the various lines of trade, until it is exceedingly overstock'd:—The Towns and Villages in all parts of the Kingdom are fill'd with Shops and Warehouses, and glutted and loaded with manufactured goods; so that in some branches there are sufficient on hand to supply the demand for several years to come, (except the poor shou'd become *buyers*, instead of *beggars*, which there is no appearance of at present) while on the contrary the stock of provisions is in general kept so low, that *one* failing season is severely felt by the major part of the nation;—not to mention the great evil which sometimes happens by covetous, *overgrown* Farmers monopolizing, and keeping back produce from the
markets

markets an unreasonable time, in order to enhance their prices and profits.

We therefore intreat you, for the sake of the health, the morals, and the *true* prosperity of the nation, to exercise the same power with respect to *landed* property, as you already have done in *money* matters; and as you have set a bar before covetousness and oppression by limiting the rate of *Interest*, we pray that you will in like manner fix bounds to the extent or rents of *Farms*; in which case, certainly, justice requires your interference full as much as in the other, and we believe much more.

Suffer, Gentlemen, the well-wishers of the nation to advise and persuade you, to ordain as small and quick a division of the large Farms as possible, and also a speedy inclosure and cultivation of the Forests and Commons, and a distribution thereof in small lots among the poor, at low rents: that by these means a door may be opened for the discharge of that intollerable, increasing load which for years past has overburdened trade, and fill'd it with Swindlers, Sharpers, Thieves, and Insolvents :*

We beg you to remember, that though God hath cast wealth and power into your portion, yet a few years will destroy those distinctions between you and your Petitioners: and the time draws near when it will be found by

* And it is at the same time the most rational method of providing for the poor; and redressing the grievances of *poor-rates and workhouses*; which at present are far from answering their proper end, and original design, either to the payers or to the receivers,

both us and you, that justice, mercy, humility, and philanthropy; or, in other words, a GOOD conscience,—void of offence either to God or man, is the only valuable possession.

God hath given us a fruitful country; sufficient, if rationally used, to maintain many times the number of its present inhabitants in peace and plenty; and capable of being immediately changed from a land abounding with poverty, disorder, and wretchedness, to one of *real* prosperity and happiness, by a christian conduct in its possessors; and we have reason to believe that we shall see truth, mercy, righteousness and peace take place among us, in proportion as our *Teachers* and *Governors* act, or are influenced by those principles or dispositions.

We address ourselves to you as the parents, guardians, and advocates of the community; and intreat you not to despise or reject this petition because of its plainness or freedom, or for want of rank and number of signatures.—We reverence and esteem the ordinance of government; and have no intention to quarrel with a *good one* upon account of its *form*.*

It is not an affection for change or novelty, which induces us now to trouble you, but a deep sight and feeling of the great, alarming evils with which we are surrounded and threatened.—“Surely, says Solomon, oppression maketh [even] a wise man mad:”—Oh! Legislators, behold the horrid effects of it at this time among the poor inhabitants on the Continent! alas, how many innocent, aged, childless parents, and young, fatherless children and widows, are now with fainting, sorrowful, broken

* Nor yet to overthrow even a *bad* one by any other *Sword* than that of truth,—or *fire*, than of denunciation—prayer,—and sufferings.—Vengeance belongeth to God:—He will repay

broken hearts, bewailing the loss of children—parents—husbands; and sighing prayers for vengeance upon the proud, covetous, cruel authors of their misery!* and how many thousands of men—fellow-creatures—human beings—who are now groaning under the anguish of mutilated bodies,—or are already become the prey of *everlasting death*—might, perhaps, by the means of peace, good instruction, and a wise, affectionate government, have long lived a blessing to their relatives on earth, and at last have died in the hope of a happy immortality hereafter!—O cursed lust of power, honour, riches, and pleasure, what havoc hast thou made, in the course of a few years past, in every quarter of the globe!

May it please God to give us for Rulers *Men fearing Him and hating covetousness, and acting to their poor brethren as they wou'd wish to be done unto*, if situations were reversed; and we shall pray for their long continuance both in life and in *office* here, and for their eternal life and happiness hereafter!

Signed for many sober, honest, industrious,
friendly Men, and good Subjects,

London.

THOMAS BENTLEY.

March 28th, 1793.

* And besides all this, how many thousands of poor men at home (some of them perhaps even yet unborn) must for years or generations to come, by the sweat of their brows, pay the expences of all this carnage? while themselves, their wives, and children are thereby deprived of the comforts, and even necessities of life!—which is the natural consequence of the covetous, pernicious, unjust, deceitful, oppressive, ungodly, ruinous practice of loans and funds; according to the present mode of raising and establishing them for perpetuity.

